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An Exhortation to PURITY and PEACE.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the Parish-Church of
St. Mary le Bow, &c.

St. JAMES iii. 17.

The Wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisie.

AS I concluded a late Discourse with recommending this admirable Passage of *St. James* to your serious Perusal ; so I judge it very proper and seasonable again to put you in mind of it, by making it the Subject of my Discourse at this Time.

A 3

The

The Occasion of the Words was this. There were it seems some Men that valued themselves as wise and knowing Persons, above the ordinary Rank of Christians, and therefore took upon them magisterially to teach others, whilst they wanted themselves to be instructed in the Principles of Christian Wisdom, and were at the same time extremely defective in the Practical Part of Religion. These our Apostle refers to in the Beginning of this Chapter, where he says, *My Brethren be not many Masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation, Ver. 1.*

He comes afterwards to let them know the Difference between that Wisdom with which they were endued, and that which they ought to acquire, if they would be justly esteem'd Wise Men. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works, with meekness of wisdom, v. 13.* Wisdom, that is, must be manifested, not by fair Words and specious Pretences; but by good Works attended with Humility and Meekness. *But, as it follows, v. 14. if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.* Their boasting of their Wisdom was, it seems, lying against the truth. Their envying and strife were a Demonstration that their Pretences to Wisdom were false. For whatsoever knowledge they might be endued with, which they falsely call'd wisdom, it deserv'd not that

that Name : Or, if it were *wisdom*, it was of another Original and another Kind from that which a Christian ought to value himself upon. So it follows, v. 15. *This wisdom descendeth not from above*, it comes not down from Heaven ; *but is earthly, sensual, devilish* ; it is only a certain Skill to carry on worldly Interests and Projects, or to gratifie the Animal Part of the Man, or such as the Devil exerciseth and inspires Men with. For, as it follows, v. 16. *where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work*. Now it is certain, that God is not the Author of Confusion, but of Order. Evil Works are not from that Good Being, but from the Lusts, the depraved Appetites, and Passions of Men, and the Instigation of the Devil. But, as the Apostle adds in the Words of my Text, *the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*.

Having thus led you to the Words, that which I propose in the treating of them, is, briefly to explain each of these Characters of *wisdom*, and to shew as I go along that they are the Characters of true and heavenly Wisdom, *the wisdom which is from above* ; and then to apply what shall be said on this Argument to our selves.

Now the Characters which the Apostle gives of *the wisdom which is from above* are Seven.

A 4

I, It

I. *It is first pure* ; that is, it is free from all inordinate Gratification of the Lusts of the Flesh, It teaches and disposes him that is endued with it, *to mortifie the deeds of the body, and to crucifie the flesh with its affections and lusts*, and to live a Life perfectly sober, that is, temperate and chaste.) *The wisdom which is not from above* is contrary to this, *sensual* ; but true Christian Wisdom instructs a Man in the Difference there is between the two Parts of which he is composed, his Body and his Spirit, and teaches him to bring the former into subjection to the latter, that the Flesh may not defile the Spirit, but being kept in due order may become obedient and serviceable to it.

Now that *the wisdom from above* is thus pure, is evident, in that God himself is a Pure and Holy Spirit. *The wisdom therefore which cometh down from him* must necessarily dispose the Wise Man to grow up into the Likeness of God. Our Blessed Saviour, *the Word and Wisdom of the Father*, who came down from Heaven, to instruct us in the Will of God, hath strictly oblig'd his Followers to the Purity here mention'd, and was himself a Great Example of it to them ; and his Apostles every where throughout their Writings, and by their constant Practice, taught the same Lesson. One of the standing Precepts of the Gospel is, that express'd by St. Peter in those Words, *As he which hath called you is holy,*
so

so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy, 1 Pet. 1. 15, 16. And the Grace of God that bringeth salvation, teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly as well as righteously and godly in this present world, Tit. 2. 11, 12.

I might here farther observe, that St. James gives this Character with an Emphasis, *first pure*, and *then peaceable*, &c. intimating thereby, that whatever other Qualifications any Man's Wisdom might seem to have, it could not be *from above*, unless it were in the *first place pure*. This is a Qualification so fundamental, so necessary, that all the rest would be deficient without it. *Peace and Charity* and all the rest that follow are excellent Qualifications of Wisdom; but unless there be *Purity* also, the Character of *divine* and *heavenly* Wisdom will not be complete.

II. The next Character is, that it is *peaceable*. Wisdom having first put the Man in a right Temper with respect to himself, it disposes him duly towards his Neighbour. It makes him a hearty Lover, and a diligent Follower of Peace; Peace with all the World, especially with those to whom he stands most nearly related, and with whom he has the most frequent Opportunities of conversing; and more particularly yet with his Christian Brethren. This Wisdom will teach him industriously

seriously to avoid all Occasions of Quarrelling, to suppress the first Beginnings of it, *to leave off contention before it be meddled with*, Prov. 17. 14. to prevent or compose the Differences which he observes between other Men, and especially to keep himself disengag'd; in a word, *if it be possible, and as much as in him lies, to live peaceably with all men*, Rom. 12. 18. and to procure all other Mens living peaceably among themselves. *If it be possible*, says the Apostle, *and as much as in you lies*, viz. if it can be done without offending God, and wronging our own Consciences. For we must never violate any of the Commands of God, in compliance with the Humour or Will of Men. And if there are any to be found so unpeaceable, as that when we have done all that lies in us to render them easie, will still quarrel with us, this will be accounted their Fault, not ours; especially if they are so wicked as to accuse us of breaking the Peace, only for persisting in the Practice of our Duty. It is impossible for us in such Cases, it doth not lie in us to live peaceably with such Men.

But we should always take especial care, that we do not by needless and affected Opposition offend others; that in all things truly innocent we rather forego our own Humour and Pleasure, than contend; in a word, that we value Peace before every thing else, but doing our Duty to God, and preserving our Consciences void of Offence,

Now

Now that *the wisdom from above* is thus *peaceable*, there can be no question, when we remember that God hath made Men sociable Creatures, and design'd them for mutual Converse and Assistance ; and that Peace is the great Cement of Human Society, that which renders mutual Converse desirable and useful ; and is indeed absolutely necessary to make it tolerable. Add to this that the Love of our Fellow Creatures (which Love is the Great Principle and Fountan of Peace among Men) is one Half of that Law which God hath given us both in Nature, and by his written Word.

This therefore and the former Character are well put together in the Precept given in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, Ch. 12. ver. 14. *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

III. The next Character is, *Gentle*. It is the same Word which is elsewhere translated by the Word *Moderation*. *Let your moderation be known unto all men*, Phil. 4. 5. and it is well placed after *peaceable*, *moderation* being the great Preservative of *peace*.

This *gentleness*, or *moderation*, is, according to the Signification of the original Word, a Readiness to yield or give way, for Peace sake to recede from our own strict Right, that which we might legally and justly challenge as our Due ; not to take all the Advantage against another

another Man, that he may have given us ; to put the fairest and most candid Interpretation we can upon the Actions of another ; if he have done amiss, to be ready to hear what he can say for himself, and our selves to make the best Excuse we can for him ; to allow every one all that he can with any tolerable Pretence claim as his Due, and to give up what it may be we might upon the like Pretence claim as ours, if by these Means we may prevent Contention.

There must indeed be the Exercise of Prudence in this Case, I mean so much as is necessary to preserve us from the Insults of unreasonable and violent Men, who may attempt to deprive us of those Rights which we can't give up without considerable Injury to our selves. But wherever the Right we lay claim to is not very considerable, and the insisting upon it tends rather to gratifie our Humour, or to please our Fancy, there is always place for this Vertue of *gentleness* and *moderation*, and the Exercise of it is often absolutely necessary to the preserving Peace in the World ; and consequently if the *wisdom which is from above is peaceable*, it must be *gentle* also. St. Paul hath excellently express'd this Vertue, proposing our Lord and Saviour as an eminent Example thereof, *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please our selves. Let everyone of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself, Rom. 15. 1, 2, 3,* IV,

IV. The next Character is, That it is *easie to be intreated*.

If any one have given Offence to the Person endued with this Wisdom, he will easily upon his Repentance be perswaded to forgive him. If he have himself been mistaken, he will hear what others can say for the rectifying of his Error, and will not persist in it against a fair Reason offer'd to the contrary. He will change his Judgment, if he see Cause, and he will readily hear what Cause another Man pretends to alledge for his doing so. He will listen to any good Advice that is given to him, and will not be hard to be wrought upon by the Intreaties of those that desire his Favour and Assistance. All this I take to be included in being *easie to be intreated*. It is not being easie to be mov'd meerly by Importunity, without Reason, against the settled Judgment of ones own Mind. That would be Levity and Folly: But it is an Easiness to hear every thing that can in Reason or Equity be proposed to him, and a Readiness to assent and comply as soon as ever he is convinced.

And this is Divine and Heavenly Wisdom. For Reason is from God. Equity is that which He takes pleasure in, making it the Measure of his own Proceedings, and expecting that all whom He hath endued with a reasonable Nature should make it the Standard of their Resolutions and Actions.

V. The

V. The wisdom which is from above is moreover full of mercy and good fruits.

Mercy here may be taken for the Principle, and *good Fruits* for the Effects of that Principle. Divine Wisdom fills Men with Tenderness and Compassion towards others that are miserable in any respect, whether it be from their bodily Infirmities, or the Disorder of their Minds, or from any Calamity that befalls them from without. It disposes them to represent and conceive of the Case of others, as if it were their own, to have an inward Feeling of their Unhappiness, and as consequent upon this to do whatever lies in their Power towards their Relief and Assistance; to feed the Hungry, to cloath the Naked, to visit and administer to the Sick and Imprisoned, to comfort the Disconsolate, to support the Weak-hearted, to instruct the Ignorant, to admonish and reclaim Transgressors. These are the *good fruits*, which are the natural Effects of the *mercy* here mention'd, of which St. *James* says that the Wise Man is full. He is not sparing nor niggardly, but liberal and plenteous in all these good Works, so acceptable to God, and so useful to Men.

And this Wisdom must needs *come down from above*, even from God the Fountain of all Good, who desireth and designeth the Welfare and Happiness of his Creatures, and hath obliged them to use their best Endeavours to make each other easie and happy.

It

It is indeed true Wisdom, if we do but consult our own Interest. For we can exercise no mercy, we can produce no good Fruits towards others, but what we our selves may stand in need of at their Hands, and what both God and Man will be ready to return to us, if we have, when we had Ability and Opportunity, exercised 'em towards our Fellow Creatures.

VI. *It is without partiality.* So our Translators have rendred the original Word, a Word of a doubtful Signification, agreeably to the Sense of the Apostle in this place.

St. James had in the former Chapter reprov'd those he wrote Chap. 2. v. 1,
2, 3, 4. to as guilty of respecting of Persons, valuing and preferring the Rich, but despising and discountenancing the Poor. *My Brethren have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of Glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay cloathing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in your selves? Now on the contrary the wisdom which is from above is without partiality.* It teaches Men not to value others upon the Account of their external Advantages in the World, *not to know any man*

man after the flesh, 2 Cor. 5. 16. as St. Paul expresses himself, and consequently not to deal with them upon any partial Regards : But to look upon all Men as our Brethren, of the same Nature with our selves ; to esteem all our Christian Brethren as Members of that one Body of which Christ is the Head ; and by Consequence to be just and equitable towards all, the Poor as well as the Rich ; no more to despise the Advice of an Inferiour than of a Superiour ; not to condemn the miserable by reason of their low and afflicted Condition, but for that very Reason to exercise Tenderness and Compassion towards them.

And this surely is a just Character of the Wisdom that is from God, who is *no respecter of persons*, who, as He made, so He regardeth the Poor as well as the Rich ; who desireth and hath provided for the Welfare and Happiness of the Meanest of his reasonable Creatures, as much as of the greatest Prince or Potentate upon Earth, and hath determin'd to deal with all of them, not according to their external Circumstances, but according to their Deeds.

VII. It is in the last Place *without hypocrisie*.

What it pretends to be, it really is. Its Regard in all its Behaviour is to God more than to Men. And therefore when it professes to be *pure, peaceable, gentle, and easie to be intreated*, &c. as in the Character before mention'd, it is all this in truth, as in the Presence, and in hopes of the Acceptance of that God who

who knows the Hearts, and is intimate and thoroughly acquainted with the Consciences of Men.

And this must certainly be another Character of *the wisdom from above*, which renders the Man that is indued with it like to the God of Truth, and fills him with so awful a Regard to Him.

And thus I have gone through the several Characters of Divine and Heavenly Wisdom, as given by St. James. All that remains is to make some Application, of what has been said, to our selves.

And from this Doctrine I have been insisting upon, we may be reasonably mov'd to bewail the present State of the Christian World, and in a more, especial manner the State of our own Church and Nation at this time. 'Tis a just Cause of Lamentation to every serious Christian, who understands the Religion which he professes, to consider, how little there is to be found of that *wisdom which is from above*, which comes down from God, and which leads to those Heavenly Regions where God dwelleth.

— The great Design of our Saviour's Gospel was to root out all Impurity and Uncharitableness from the Earth, to call Men to Holiness and to Peace, that they might resemble Almighty God, and be easie and happy in the Society of each other in this Life, and that they might live for ever in the Love of God and one another in the Life to come. In the first Ages of Christianity the true Spirit of our Saviour's Religion did mightily prevail among its Professors,

effors, so that they became remarkable to all that beheld them, distinguishing themselves from the rest of Mankind, by their Purity and Charity.

But alas! the Church has been long since corrupted; the Tempers and the Manners of Christians defiled; and *bitter enmity and strife* have produc'd *confusion and every evil work*.

To omit the Consideration of the other Parts of *Christendom*, let us cast an Eye upon our own State, with which we are best acquainted, and in which we are most concern'd.

How many among us, notwithstanding our Profession of the Pure and Holy Doctrine of the Gospel, do yet live in the Sins of Intemperance and Uncleanness? How few have attain'd to that Purity of Heart and Life, which the Gospel makes the necessary Conditions of Salvation? And that which I would principally take notice of at this time, what Wrath and Fury, what bitter Zeal and Envy have been of late stirr'd up among us? Instead of humbling our selves in the Sight of God, and heartily repenting of those great and heinous Sins whereby we have provok'd Him to Displeasure against us; instead of turning to him, amending every one of us our own Ways, and joining together in our common Supplications for the Favour of God towards our Church and Nation; as the present Posture of our Affairs requires, we are setting our selves at this time to provoke Him more and more by our unreasonable and groundless, yet fierce and outrageous Contentions.

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Is it, do we think, a part of the wisdom which is from above, when we are in Danger from a common Enemy without, thus by our intestine Quarrels to lay our selves open to him? Is it a part of that wisdom when we should endeavour to engage Almighty God on our side, thus to provoke Him to give us up as a Prey to our Adversaries? O foolish people, and without understanding, whom neither Reason, nor Experience, nor Religion can convince or persuade!

If this be the Effect of Wisdom, it is of that Wisdom mention'd a little before my Text, which is earthly, sensual, devilish.

Whilst we have this bitter envying and strife in our Hearts, if we pretend to true Wisdom, it is, as our Apostle declares, vain glorying and boasting, it is lying against the truth. 'Tis certain, whatsoever we may pretend or profess, whilst we are either impure or unpeaceable, we can be neither wise Men nor true Christians.

When I seriously view the Rise, the Progress, and the present State of our Controversies, the first thing that naturally occurs to my Thoughts is this, The Enemy, the ancient the known Enemy of our Church and Nation, has once again sown these Tares of Contention among us, in hopes that what he has not been able hitherto to effect by other Means, we will at last be pleas'd to do for him our selves, viz. procure our own Ruin and Destruction.

But this is not all. There seems to me to be something more than Humane in this Instance, it looks very like an Insatiation from Heaven, as a Punishment for our other Transgressions. It

may justly be fear'd that it is the Operation of some evil and accursed Spirit, let loose from the infernal Caverns, and sent as a spiteful and subtle Emissary to irritate us one against another, and to propagate the Temper of Hell here upon Earth.

Let us, my Brethren, take time a little to cool and to reflect ; let us seriously and impartially consider the Case. What are the true Grounds and Reasons of our Quarrels ? Are we not one Body ? Are not our Civil Interests the same ? Are we not all concern'd and engag'd to maintain and defend the present Government, in Opposition to the great and common Enemy of *Europe* ? Have we not been wonderfully deliver'd and preserv'd hitherto ? Can any Man among us desire to be again expos'd to the Dangers which we have so narrowly escap'd ; or to fall into those Hands out of which Divine Providence hath so kindly rescu'd us ? God forbid that we should think this of any *Protestant* or *Englishman*. Do we not live under a legal, a just, and a mild Government, every honest and peaceable Man enjoying his Own without Disturbance ? Has there been any illegal Violence offer'd even to the Unpeaceable and Unquiet among us ?

Hath not Almighty God of late Years, under the present Administration, bless'd us with unparallel'd Victories and Successes, and brought us, we hope, in view of that Peace which is the only thing we have aim'd at in this just and necessary War ? Is falling out among our selves, and running into Tumults and Riots, the proper Method to express our Gratitude to God for these

these Blessings, or to strengthen the Hands of our Governours, under whose Management we enjoy them ?

Give me leave to go a little farther. Can any one with appearance of Truth or Reason say, that the Church by Law establish'd is in any other Danger, than what proceeds from our crying Sins, and among them in a special manner from our mutual Jealousies and Animosities ? I will appeal to the Senses of all that hear me. Are not our Churches as well fill'd, our Prayers and Sacraments and Sermons as much, nay more frequented than ever ? Can it be any just Offence or Scandal to a good Church-man, to see those that unhappily and unreasonably dissent from us, allow'd by the Government to worship Almighty God in a less perfect Way, till they can be convinc'd, as we are, that ours is more perfect and excellent ? Is offering Violence to them the way to convince 'em, and to persuade them to like us better, and to come nearer to us ? Are there any violent and turbulent Spirits among them ? I doubt not but there are. It were well if there were none any where else. I would to God we could not match them among our selves. Let me speak this plain Truth. Had those violent Spirits been educated among us, they wou'd have been turbulent Church-men : And had our violent Spirits been educated amongst them, they would have been turbulent Dissenters. These Men are on neither side govern'd by Reason or Religion, but by Temper and Education. Their Passions have not yet been subdued, nor their Minds duly subjected to the Laws of God and
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our Saviour. Education makes em either Church-men or Dissenters, as it happens; and their Tempers render them violent and boisterous on either side; insomuch that often times when they change their Party they carry their Tempers along with them.

But let me farther enquire. Is not the Word *Church*, too often used as a Term to aggravate the Quarrel; whilst our Differences, if we have any, are really about Civil, not Ecclesiastical Matters? This is too evident from that vile but senseless Distinction of *Church-men* one from another, which is in so frequent use of late that I need not name it.

Let me only appeal to your Consciences, Whether those who constantly frequent all the Offices of our Church, and devoutly attend upon its Service, who conscientiously and strictly observe its Rules and Orders, and neither by their Tempers nor Practices bring any Dishonour to it; whether these Men, I say, are fit to be stigmatiz'd with the Characters of Low Church-men, Dissenters, Fanaticks, and what not? For no other Reason but because they do not think and act, as some other Men do, with respect to the late Revolution, or the present Establishment.

'Tis time to speak plain. 'Tis time, if it be not too late, for us to admonish our Flock, and to warn them of the Danger they are insensibly expos'd to, by the Craft and Wiliness of those who are Enemies both to our Church and Nation. Let me therefore conclude this just Complaint, with an earnest Exhortation to all that hear me, seriously and impartially to weigh and consider these

these things with themselves, that they may not be imposed upon by such as ever did and ever will seek our Ruin.

I doubt not but that there are many well-meaning People among us, who have no other Design than to express their Zeal for the Preservation of the Church establish'd by Law. And an honest and good Zeal it is, if directed by Wisdom. Let me only put these in mind, that the word *Church* signifies a *Congregation of Christians*, that is, of those who live by the Laws, and after the Example of Christ, our Lord and Master; and that *Party* and *Peaceableness* are essential to a Christian; and that a Zeal for the best Church in the World will not justify an unholy Man, nor excuse an unpeaceable one.

If therefore we would be wise with the wisdom which came down from Heaven, and which will lead to Heaven; let us in the first place cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. In the next place let us be peaceable, our selves, and zealously promote Peace and Good will among Men, especially among our Christian Brethren. Let us be gentle or moderate. I don't mean moderate, that is indifferent, in the necessary Defence of the great and fundamental Truths of the Gospel; or in the Practice of the great Duties of our holy Religion, whether towards God, or towards Men; or in the due Government of our selves; there is the proper place for the exercising our Zeal: But moderate in our Passions, moderate in our Zeal about Matters of smaller Moment

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in Religion, moderate in our Censures of those that differ from us.

Let us *be easie to be intreated*, ready to give up our own Humours and Wills, and in some measure our own Rights too, when highly conducive to the Preservation of Peace and Order. Let us be *full of mercy and good fruits*, compassionate to all in Distress, relieving and assisting them to the best of our Power.

Finally let us be *without partiality*, demeaning our selves as Christians, not only to those of our own Party; but to all others also that are of the same Religion, nay of the same Nature with our selves: And *without hypocrisie*, being sincere and upright in the Sight of God, making no Pretences before Men, but such as we can justify before God and our own Consciences.

To conclude. Let us propose it as the great Design and Business of our Lives, to approve our selves the Servants of God, and the Disciples of our Lord and Saviour, by doing those things which are pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ, agreeable to the Frame of our Natures, and useful to our Fellow Creatures. So shall we be wise with that *wisdom which cometh down from above*, wise with respect to our best Interest, wise with respect to the Interest of our Church and Nation, and wise with respect to our everlasting Well-being.

May Almighty God inspire us all with this wisdom, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Eternal Spirit be Praise and Glory now and for ever,

A M E N.